

May 22, 2012

Members of the Denver Public Schools Board of Education

900 Grant St.

Denver, CO 80203

Dear School Board Members,

The Donnell-Kay Foundation and a group of our community partners are pleased to provide you with a copy of our latest paper titled "True North: Goals for Denver Public Schools." It lays out our belief that the fundamental purpose of DPS (and all school districts) is to graduate students who are sufficiently proficient to meet the personal and professional challenges of our society. By this measure, DPS is far behind and not rapidly making the grade. However, by focusing on the right priorities and goals, we know DPS can improve at a rate fast enough to meet that purpose.

Two fundamental principles guide our proposed goals: achievement and access. First, all students must leave high school having developed the skills and content knowledge to be successful in college and in their careers. Of the tools currently available, the best measurement of exit-level proficiency and post-secondary success is the ACT test, taken by all Colorado students in their junior (11th) year. ACT results should be the primary metric by which to judge a school district's success.

Second, we strongly believe that all students – regardless of grade level, demographics, and location – must have equal opportunity to attend quality schools. Choice without quality schools is a hollow goal. The two must be strongly linked.

To move the district forward, we suggest DPS set its ultimate goals higher and measure itself annually against rigorous, quantifiable indicators tied to the goals of achievement and access. In the paper we provide three goals for achievement and access, as well as additional context, historical benchmarks, and eight annual indicators to gauge progress towards these goals. While DPS has a long way to go to reach the achievement and access goals, it can – and must – be done.

We have provided this paper and recommendations knowing that most similar efforts are quickly outdated and often tossed aside. These goals, principles and indicators however are intentionally somewhat timeless – graduating students ready for the next steps in their lives is neither a short-term nor a transitory goal, but it must be the standard against which our public education system is measured.

Importantly, DPS must begin to report on the numbers and percentages of students who meet basic standards for college-readiness by content area on the ACT. We call on the Board of Education – each member – to embrace and implement these recommendations. And finally, we call on the Board, Superintendent and administration to measure themselves against the goals of exit-level proficiency and equal access by aligning board and superintendent evaluations to them and annually reporting to the community on their progress.



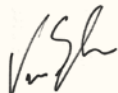
Tony Lewis
Executive Director,
Donnell-Kay
Foundation



Miguel Oaxaca
Board Chair,
Together Colorado



Paul Lhevine
Executive Director,
Stand for Children
Colorado



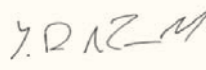
Van Schoales
Executive Director,
A+ Denver



MEMBERS OF THE A+ BOARD



Mary Cronin
Co-Chair



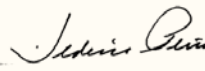
Terrance Carrol
Co-Chair



Anna Alejo



Denise Maes



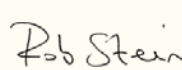
Federico Pena




Jesus Salazar



David Scanavino



Rob Stein



Landri Taylor



Chuck Ward

TRUE NORTH: GOALS FOR DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



The fundamental purpose of any public school system is to graduate students at a level of proficiency that

enables them to meet the professional and personal challenges of the modern world. The purpose is not to have proficient 3rd, 5th, or 8th graders, nor to have academic growth that still leaves students unable to read, write, and perform math at the level necessary to fully participate in and contribute to our democratic society.

Many metrics along K-12 education may serve as indicators of potential success, but they are not goals. Students must leave the public school system at least proficient enough to face the tasks ahead. At the moment when students depart the K-12 system to enter college or career, it matters neither how proficient they were years before, nor the pace at which they have risen. Simply put: exit-level proficiency should be the primary goal of any public school system.

This is not to say that proficiency should form the ceiling of academic achievement. Quite the opposite: basic proficiency should be the floor of measurement – the foundation upon which students can then further build academic mastery, curiosity, and intellectual creativity. Students leaving our public school system will require a number of twenty-first century skills – collaboration, creativity, technical, leadership and others – many of which are difficult to quantify. We aspire to a school system where proficiency is guaranteed and our attention can be directed towards other metrics. But, given the current landscape of Denver’s public schools, we must first focus on bringing our students to proficiency.

Proficiency goals should apply to all students equally. Far too often, access to a quality education depends on demographics, income, geography, or school level. Inherent in any academic proficiency goal is the belief that all our children are equal, and they must all be given the same opportunities to succeed.

The most recent version of The Denver Plan – the primary strategic document for the district – lists five major goals and multiple supporting indicators. However, too few of these goals (and the accompanying metrics) either focus on or prioritize academic achievement. DPS can often meet the objectives in the Denver Plan regardless of a corresponding rise or decline in student academic outcomes. The current goals of the Denver Plan lack rigor, structure, and consistency (and we provide a detailed assessment of them in Appendix A).

In place of these goals, we urge a renewed focus on two fundamental principles that are critical to Denver Public Schools:

- **Achievement:** students must attain annual academic growth so that they possess a sufficient level of proficiency upon leaving the district.
- **Access:** students must have equal opportunity to attend quality schools regardless of their grade level, demographics, and location.

Achievement and access form an axis on which the district can accomplish its central purpose of exit-level proficiency for all students. We propose three simple long-term goals for DPS. In support of those three goals, we provide additional context, historical benchmarks, and eight indicators to gauge annual progress.

Make no mistake, the ability of DPS to offer consistent access to quality schools so that all students leave the district at a reasonable level of proficiency is, even under the best possible assumptions, many years away. However these are the fundamental goals that our communities should demand from a public education system, and a focus on and progress towards them is paramount.

To measure improvement towards these goals, we have selected annual indicators of success that are both ambitious and achievable. In most cases we use recent data for historical benchmarks, recognizing the unfortunate reality that the distance between current performance and the long-term goal is a wide gulf that will require many years of sustained progress to bridge.

In several areas – particularly regarding academic growth – we believe DPS should outperform the state averages by a healthy margin. While some may see this as laudable but unrealistic, we respectfully disagree. Denver has adopted many education reforms not found elsewhere in Colorado: the district has a vibrant charter school community; a growing number of innovation schools; recent successful bonds; over \$100M of support from private philanthropic groups; and a wide number of other programs all geared to improving our public education system.

Instituting these and other initiatives is to DPS's credit; however these policies and the resources they demand must ultimately lead to better educational outcomes for students. Moreover, unless the district is able to maintain academic growth considerably higher than the state average, far too many of the next generation of its students will leave unprepared for either college or career. Well ahead of the average Colorado district in both the pace and depth of its reform efforts, DPS should only be satisfied with a similar premium in academic outcomes for its students.

We considered a number of other goals and saw fundamental problems with each. Increasing graduation rates is a laudable objective, however graduation without benchmark academic achievement is specious, and there are legitimate concerns about credit recovery programs and other strategies that increase graduation rates while proficiency remains stagnant.

We likewise considered student mobility (the advancement of students from one grade to the next), yet believe that there are serious flaws in unrestrained social promotion and that there are times when students are better off being retained in the same grade for an additional year. Lastly, we considered increases in overall enrollment – a signal of demand and involvement from local students and families. However increases in enrollment simply do not directly address the primary goal of career and college preparation, and it may well be that for some students, their desired path is available outside the district.

We prefer to avoid incentives that might encourage graduation and advancement without academic achievement, or discourage families from finding the best option for their children. We would like to see increases in graduation, mobility, and enrollment but do not believe these to be ends in themselves. If the district is able to meet goals of achievement and access, these and other metrics should rise as well.

Achievement:

Long-Term Goals:

- 1. All 11th grade students should meet the Colorado Department of Higher Education's (CDHE) recommended ACT scores to bypass college remediation: 18 in English; 17 in reading; 19 in math.*
- 2. The average 11th grade student should meet the College Board's recommended ACT scores to have a high probability of success in college: 18 in English; 21 in reading; 22 in math.*

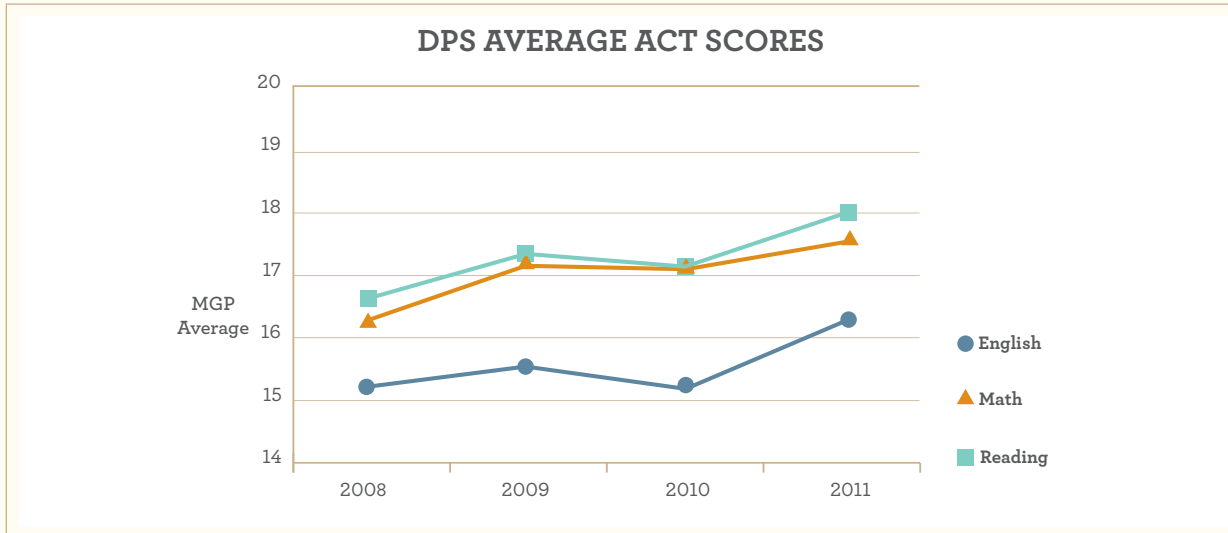
Context: Ultimately, a district needs to be judged by the proficiency and preparedness of its graduates. There are considerable indicators of academic status during K-12 education, but any district without proficient students at the end of their term is insufficient.

The final district-wide measurement of proficiency and college readiness in Denver is the 11th grade ACT assessment. There are several issues with the ACT test, including how accurately it measures the appropriate standards and skills. A more robust measure of student knowledge should be available. Ideally, we would include an assessment linking Colorado's students to international benchmarks. However, for the purposes of this paper, we are limited to choosing among the available options, of which we believe the ACT test is the best alternative. We use ACT scores as a proxy for the district's exit-level proficiency; however we also encourage the use of exit-level proficiency for individual schools, particularly with cohort data. For example, in a 6-8 school, 6th grade proficiency is largely inherited and is not as good an indication of the school's quality and impact as is 8th grade proficiency.

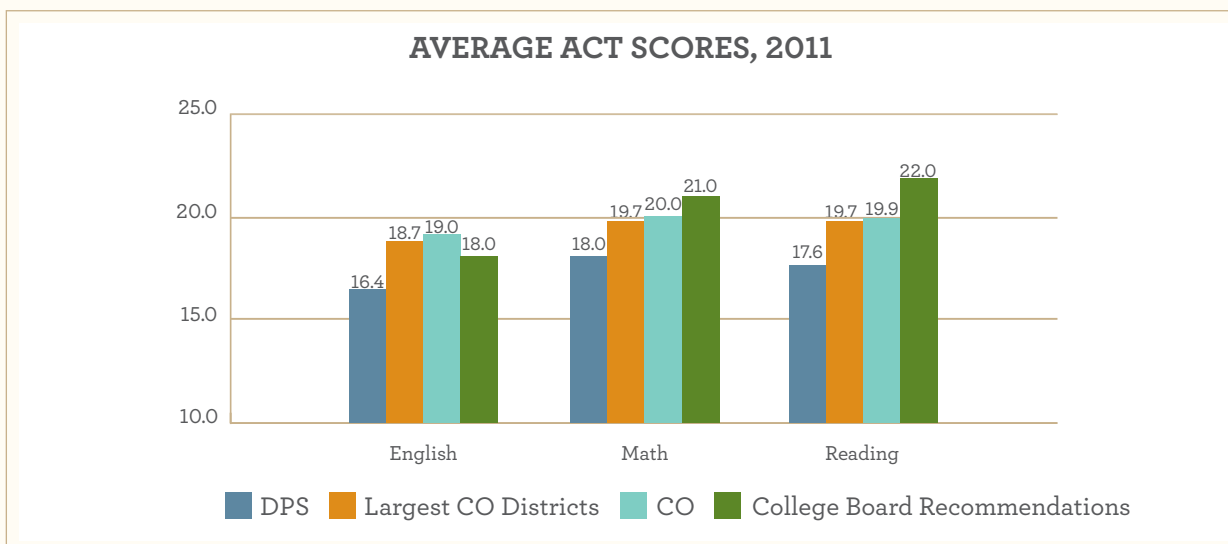
Currently, neither the district nor the state report on the number or percentage of students at each score level on the ACT, including how many students meet the minimum standards advocated by CDHE or the College Board. Understanding exit-level proficiency is crucial to any assessment of public education. Averages are useful but do not give a clear view into the absolute number of students who are, and are not, achieving threshold minimums.

We strongly encourage both CDE and DPS to begin to report on the number and percentage of ACT scores that are at or above specific bands, including the College Board's and CDHE's base levels of college readiness. These scores should be publicly available (in the same manner as average ACT scores are currently) at both the district and school level, as soon as is feasibly possible.

Historical Benchmarks: In 2011, DPS's average ACT scores were 16.4 (English), 18.0 (math) and 17.6 (reading). ACT scores in the district have increased slightly (although unevenly) over the past three years.



Even with this upward trend, Denver is behind other large districts and the state. The average ACT scores for the largest quintile of schools districts in Colorado were (respectively) 18.7, 19.7, and 19.7; for Colorado overall they were 19.0, 20.0, and 19.9:¹



¹ For those unfamiliar with ACT scores, a useful comparative point is 10th grade CSAP results. In 2011, DPS averages were 19 (math), 50 (reading) and 30 (writing), compared to the respective state averages of 33, 66, 67.

To close this gap, DPS should have specific goals for academic growth at each school level (elementary, middle, high school). Again, these annual growth goals are not an end in themselves but serve to bridge the proficiency gap and create student achievement sufficient to prepare Denver students for the challenges that will come at the end of their public school tenure.

It is clear that average or marginal academic growth will not bridge the gap to allow DPS students to meet ACT goals for proficiency and preparedness. Over the past three years, DPS median growth percentiles have averaged 52.4 in elementary schools, 52.9 in middle schools, and 53.2 in high schools. In 2011, these measures were 51.3 in elementary schools and 54.0 in middle and high schools. While all outrank the state median of 50, faster growth is necessary to bridge the extraordinary gulf of basic proficiency between those students exiting the district and even minimal standards for future success in college or work.

To put DPS's scores in context, we compared the academic growth scores of DPS with the largest 35 Colorado districts (roughly the top quintile):

2011 ACADEMIC GROWTH SCORES OF 35 LARGEST CO DISTRICTS						
	Low	High	Mean	Stn Dev	DPS	DPS Rank
Elementary	38.3	57.0	50.0	4.5	51.3	15
Middle	35.3	64.7	49.2	6.0	54.0	7
High	36.0	64.7	49.1	6.1	54.0	7

While DPS is above the average at all levels, given the considerable resources and attention on improvements over the past several years, the district should do better. Students in DPS should have a goal of academic growth at least one standard deviation better than the median of the largest 35 Colorado districts. This goal implies that DPS should rightly aim to be in roughly the top third of Colorado's largest districts for student academic growth – a reasonable goal for a district lauded as a national leader in education reform.

In 2011, DPS elementary schools had a standard deviation of 0.3 from the mean, while middle and high schools were both 0.8. DPS is within close range of this goal of one standard deviation in both middle and high school, while lagging in elementary school. This is not an insurmountable task.

There is inherent promise in exceeding state averages, but higher growth is necessary if the district is to close its proficiency gaps. Based on 2011 scores, a level of at least one standard deviation – so that DPS is in roughly the highest third of the 35 largest Colorado school districts – requires academic growth of 54.5 in elementary school, 55.2 in middle school, and 55.1 in high school.² These should be DPS's metrics for academic growth.

² We measured the 2011 mean and standard deviation for academic growth for the largest 35 Colorado school districts (roughly the top quintile) with an N count above 20 students (excluding DPS from the calculations). All districts and data are listed in Appendix B.

Annual Indicators: In addition to making progress on the 11th grade ACT tests, DPS should have annual academic growth indicators by school level (elementary, middle, and high).

- a) *The percentage of students with 11th grade ACT scores at or above CDHE recommendations will grow by [³] percentage points every year until all students meet this level.*
- b) *The average ACT score will rise by 2.25 percentage points each year until it meets College Board minimums for collegiate success.⁴*
- c) *Elementary school median growth percentile will be one standard deviation or more above the state median (roughly 54.5 or above).*
- d) *Middle school median growth percentile will be one standard deviation or more above the state median (roughly 55.0 or above).*
- e) *High school median growth percentile will be one standard deviation or more above the state median (roughly 55.0 or above)*

II. Access:

Long-Term Goal:

- 3. *All DPS students, regardless of grade level, demographics, or geography, should have access to a quality school.*

Context: The district has a single mechanism to achieve its goals for academic achievement: its schools. While there are a wide variety of both policies and programs that can be used to create and maintain quality schools, it is the schools themselves that must ultimately be responsible for academic goals. If the district intends to successfully achieve its purpose of every student at proficiency, it must focus on both creating and maintaining quality schools at every level and ensuring equal access to these schools.

The definition of a “quality school” is elusive and controversial, so we prefer to use DPS’s own criteria as developed on their School Performance Framework (SPF). However, though we agree with the basic quality criteria in the SPF, we believe its cut points are too lax.

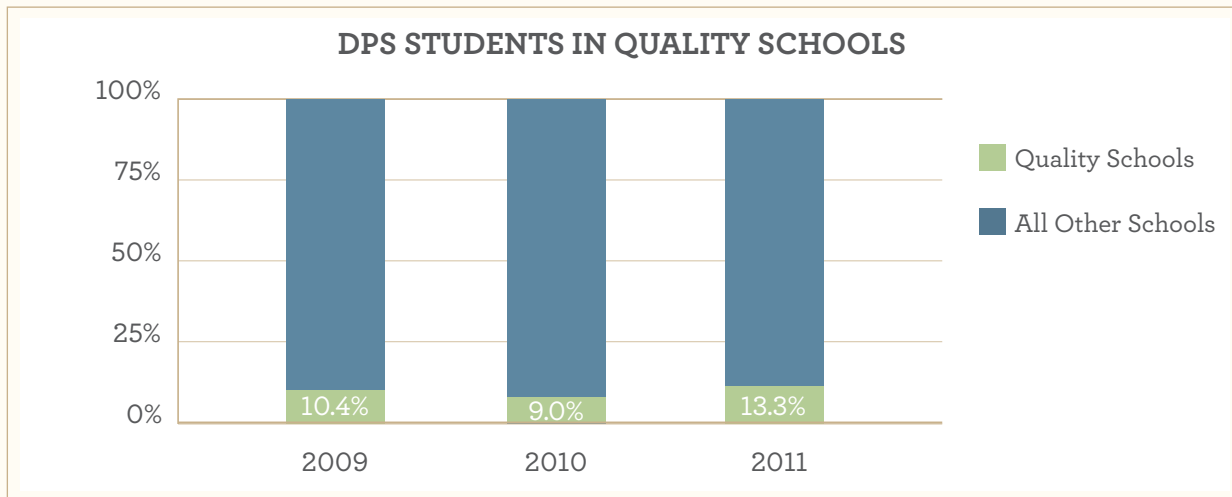
Currently, the top two of five separate SPF performance levels (“distinguished” and “meets expectations”) are set for schools that achieve 50% or more of possible points. This set of expectations is far too low. Over half of all DPS schools are rated in these two performance levels, but many of them feature exit-level proficiency well below acceptable levels and marginal academic growth unlikely to close proficiency gaps. Clearly, some of these schools are not meeting the expectations required to maintain or lift exit-level proficiency to a reasonable standard.

³ Without initial measurement of the number and percentage of students who are at these levels, it is premature to assign a goal; it is our hope and expectation that DPS and CDE will report on these metrics, and we will then calculate a reasonable annual indicator towards the goal of every students meeting this standard.

⁴ An annual increase of 2.25% will allow the average DPS ACT subject score to meet College Board minimums within a decade (4 years for English, 8 years for reading, and 9 years for math).

We have chosen to limit our definition of quality schools to those that receive 70% or more of possible points on the SPF, a threshold that currently includes 25 of the 137 schools (or 18%). We think that this is a fair definition that better reflects the standards and progress needed to prepare the district's students for postsecondary success. Schools at this level are more likely to move students towards achievement – even if many will be at a slower pace than we prefer.

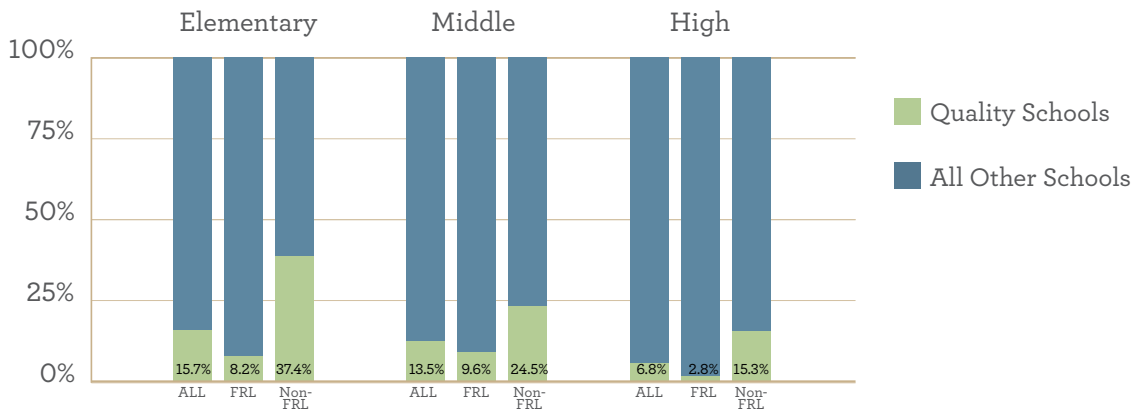
Historical Benchmarks: Based on Denver's 2011 school performance framework, 13.3% of all students were enrolled in a school that met the proposed threshold of 70% of possible points. The percentage of students in these quality schools has moved unevenly in the past three years, from 10.4% in 2009 and 9.0% in 2010.



Low-income students are under-represented across all years. Just 7.4% of free and reduced lunch (FRL) students were enrolled in a quality school in 2011, 6.0% in 2010, and 5.2% in 2009 (compared to non-FRL percentages of 29.2%, 16.8%, and 21.6% respectively). In 2011, a non-FRL student had a 29% chance of attending a quality school, while a FRL student had just a 7% chance, emphasizing the importance of ensuring equal access to quality schools.

Using October 2011 count data, and assuming that FRL students are distributed evenly across school levels, we estimate that in 2011, 15.7% of elementary students were enrolled in a quality school, compared to 13.5% of middle school students and just 6.8% of high school students. Across all school levels, as seen in the chart below, a far lower percentage of low-income students attended quality schools than their more affluent peers.

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN QUALITY SCHOOLS, 2011



The percentage of students in quality schools both declines as a student ascends into secondary grades and is far less likely if a student is in poverty. At no level do quality schools serve more than 10% of Denver's low-income student population. The disparity in this data makes a strong case for a specific goal to ensure equal access for all children to our best schools.

Annual Indicators: The district should increase the total number of quality schools at all levels, while ensuring equal access for low-income children. However, assuming an SPF threshold of 70% for quality schools, the district is working off an exceptional low base in the secondary grades. In 2011, there were roughly 6,830 elementary student in quality schools but just 2,040 middle school students and 1,100 high school students. For this reason, we treat elementary schools differently and assign a goal of a percentage increase; however given the low base, a similar percentage gain in middle and high schools impact too few students, and the correct goal at this level should be numerical.

- a) *Annually increase the percentage of students in quality elementary schools by at least 6.5 percentage points and the percentage of low-income students by at least 7.5 percentage points.*
- b) *Annually increase the number students in quality middle schools by at least 300 each a year (roughly a single school), with at least 240 (80%) FRL students.*
- c) *Annually increase the number students in quality high schools by at least 400 each a year (roughly a single school), with at least 320 (80%) FRL students.*

For 2012, this requires that quality schools serve an additional 1,150 total students – less than 1.5% of the district's entire enrollment. This requires roughly 1.5 additional quality elementary schools, and both a single middle and high school of quality.

There are several quality schools on the SPF that are scheduled to add grades and capacity, so even if the district does not create new quality schools, the percentage of students attending one should still

increase. In addition, the district can (and should) improve quality at existing schools to bring them over the 70% threshold.

The district will accomplish these goals in secondary grades if just one school at each level improves to meet the 70% SPF quality threshold, a task that is well within the range of expected outcomes given the activity of education reform.

Closing: We reiterate our belief that the well-intentioned mix of many disparate education reform activities in Denver Public Schools over the past several years must neither distract nor dissuade us from the fundamental reason our public schools exist: to give every student the ability and skill to meet the challenges of career and college.

Our public school system does not currently meet this standard, and until it does, we must be clear that – no matter how we might celebrate other metrics – our most basic goals remain unfulfilled. The twin goals of achievement and access outlined in the paper will keep the school district and community focused on the central purpose of our public schools system, and allow us all to measure progress towards that necessary and correct end.

Long-Term Goal	2011 Benchmarks	2012 Indicator Goal
Achievement		
1. All 11th grade students should meet the Colorado Department of Higher Education's recommended ACT score to bypass college remediation: 18 in English; 17 in reading; 19 in math.	a) [] of DPS students have ACT scores at the CDHE recommended minimum b) DPS average ACT scores are 16.4 in English; 17.6 in reading; and 18.0 in math.	a) [] of DPS students have ACT scores at the CDHE recommended minimum. b) DPS average ACT scores will be at least 16.7 in English; 18.0 in reading, and 18.4 in math.
2. The average 11th grade student should meet the College Board's recommended ACT score to have a high probability of success in college: 18 in English; 21 in reading; 22 in math.	c) DPS elementary school growth averaged 51.3 d) DPS middle school growth averaged 54.0 e) DPS high school growth averaged 54.0	c) Elementary schools' median growth percentiles will be 54.5 or above d) Middle schools' median growth percentiles will be 55 or above e) High school median growth percentiles will be 55 or above
Access		
3. All DPS students – regardless of grade level, demographics, or location – should have access to a quality school.	f) DPS has 6,830 (15.7%) of its elementary students in quality schools (and 2,655 or 8.2% of FRL elementary students) g) DPS has 2,040 (13.5%) of its middle school students in quality schools (and 1,075 or 9.6% of FRL middle school students) h) DPS has 1,105 (6.8%) of its high school students in quality schools (and 310 or 2.8% of FRL high school students)	f) DPS will have at least 22% of its elementary students in quality schools (and 16% of FRL elementary students) g) DPS will have at least 2,340 middle school students in quality schools (and 1,315 FRL middle school students) h) DPS will have at least 1,500 of its high school students in quality schools (and at least 640 FRL high school students)

Appendix A: An Assessment of the Goals in the Denver Plan

The Denver Plan lists five major DPS goals. However far too few of both these goals and their accompanying indicators have academic measurements – and on the occasions when they do, the standards are usually too low to ensure that students are gaining the skills and knowledge they need to be successful. Some goals and indicators lack metrics entirely.

Too often, the district can meet the goals of the Denver Plan regardless of a corresponding rise or decline in achievement. Student academic outcomes should be the spine connecting all district goals – instead the Denver Plan often relies on imprecise, peripheral and inconsistent measurements with little connection to academic outcomes.

We look, by section, at the five goals and accompanying indicators listed as part of the 2010 Denver Plan.

DISTRICT GOAL:

1. All students will graduate from the Denver Public Schools prepared for postsecondary success.

- The number of DPS students taking AP classes each year will grow by 3.5%, the number taking the AP test will grow each year by 3.5% and the number of students who take the test and who receive a 3, 4, or 5 will increase by 3.5% per year.
- The number of students scoring 20 or better on the ACT will grow by 3.5% of students per year by 2013.
- The graduation rate for DPS students will increase by 5% per year to reach 82% in 2012 (base of 52% for 06-07).
- The dropout rate for DPS students will decrease by 1.0% per year to be 4.4% by 2012.
- College enrollment rates will grow by 3.5% each year to 63% in 2013.

Assessment: While we agree wholeheartedly with the intent conveyed in the first goal – that all students graduate prepared for college and career success – absent is any specific measurement or metric. How, exactly, will the district determine if its students are prepared for postsecondary success or not? There is no metric here that can either be met or missed. This is a sentiment, not a goal.

Particularly as AP exams are only taken by a self-selecting subgroup, we prefer to focus on the ACT exam, which is required from all 11th grade students. As this paper indicates, we believe there should be two related goals centered on exit-level proficiency that measure postsecondary preparation: all students should meet the CDHE standards for college without remediation, and the average student should meet the College Board standard for college success.

Appendix A: An Assessment of the Goals in the Denver Plan

In contrast, the vast majority of the Denver Plan's indicators do not measure any aspect of postgraduate preparedness. The final three – graduation, dropout, and college enrollment rates – do not, by themselves, display any indication of academic preparation (indeed, the district's recent increase in graduation rates is closely matched by a corresponding increase in remediation rates). Without corresponding academic standards, none of these criteria measure postsecondary preparedness.

Moreover, there is no inherent quality component in growing the number of students in AP classes or taking AP tests. What matters is not how many students enroll in these classes, it is what they learn in them; not how many students take AP exams but how many display mastery of the subject material on them.

There are two substantive academic measures included in the Denver Plan goals above: increasing both the number of students who receive a 3, 4, or 5 on AP exams, and the number of students scoring a 20 or better on the ACT. Even here, however, there is no defined endpoint – is the standard that all students meet these metrics? Or that the average student does? While the aim of postsecondary success is correct, the Denver Plan's choices of what and how to measure attainment and progress towards this goal are errant.

DISTRICT GOAL:

2. All students will demonstrate at least one year's growth in the core content areas and meet or exceed state standards.

- An additional 3.5% of 3rd grade students will become proficient on CSAP in reading or Lectura each year for the next five years. The five-year target is an overall district proficiency rate of 68.4% in 2013.
- The percentage of students scoring above the state median percentile on CSAP, thereby demonstrating above-average performance, will grow by 2.0% each year.
- The performance gap between Asian/Caucasian students and African American and Hispanic students scoring proficient & above on CSAP will decrease by 3.5% annually, closing the achievement gap.
- On average, the proficiency rates for grade level cohorts will increase 3.5% in reading, writing and math over each year.
- On average, the percentage of students scoring unsatisfactory will decrease by 3.5% in reading, writing, and math each year.
- 3.5% of grade level English language learners will become proficient or better on the CELA Overall rating each year.

Appendix A: An Assessment of the Goals in the Denver Plan

Assessment: That students should have one year's growth in one year's time should in no way be considered a goal. It should be the absolute minimum requirement for any school or district, not the level to which they aspire.

While there are both proficiency and growth targets in the indicators, they are too low. As we have stated, DPS has a significant proficiency gap overall, as well as a considerable achievement gap between students with different demographics. Academic growth of 2.0% is wholly insufficient to make any headway into these shortcomings.

Likewise, proficiency rates are so low that an increase of 3.5% often means little. For example, in 2011 just 36.7% of DPS students were proficient in third-grade writing. An increase of 3.5% brings that total to just 38.0 – an increase of less than one and one-half students out of every 100. The district should set its goals well above such meager accomplishments. Particularly given the ample resources and energy expended in Denver over the past few years, goals of such marginal improvements provide neither a return nor a rationale for these investments.

While we again appreciate the intent on closing the achievement gap, we believe the direction here is off course. As we showed earlier in this paper, there is a significant and shameful discrepancy in the percentage of low-income students who attend Denver's best schools. Addressing the achievement gap might take many forms, but the simplest and most efficient is probably for the district to provide equal access to its best schools, and that is where we believe DPS should focus. To increase the performance of Denver's most vulnerable students, let us start by getting them equal access to Denver's best schools.

DISTRICT GOAL

3. The number of high-performing schools as measured by the School Performance Framework will increase.

- a. The number of schools scoring above 50% of possible points on SPF will grow by 3.5% annually.

Assessment: We agree with the sentiment that there should be more high performing schools and believe there should be a quantified numerical goal as well as the admonition to increase. Notably the corresponding metric for this increase – 50% of possible points on the SPF – is not merely too low, it is unacceptable. As an example, the four schools on the 2011 SPF that are currently at the 50% threshold have academic proficiency of 42%, 38%, 34%, and 29%. Two of these have programs – one elementary and one middle school – with academic growth well under the state median of 50.

Appendix A: An Assessment of the Goals in the Denver Plan

These are academic measures that DPS should expend efforts to surpass, not to meet. This standard only furthers the low expectations that have plagued our public school system for too long. No student is served well by defining quality so lightly.

DISTRICT GOAL

4. All students will have access to full day kindergarten.

- a. By 2013, full-day Kindergarten will be available to 100% of parents who choose to enroll their in a full-day program.

Assessment: We believe this is a worthwhile initiative, but we are hard-pressed to accept that this should be one of five major goals for a school district – particularly as the directive to enroll all students in full-day kindergarten is neither within DPS’s power nor mandate. Indeed, there is considerable overlap with the Denver Preschool Program – a separate, voter-approved initiative contracted by the city – with the sole focus of increasing the number of children in ECE programs and therefore prepared for and enrolled in kindergarten. We would prefer to see DPS strengthen the subsequent 12 years students spend in its schools, rather than expand its scope in areas already covered by capable institutions.

DISTRICT GOAL

5. Enrollment will continue to increase in the Denver Public Schools.

- DPS total enrollment will grow 500 students a year to a total exceeding 77,000 in 2012, from ECE-12, including charter school students.
- By 2013, 84% of children in DPS will re-enroll in district schools the following year, excluding students graduating out of the district.

Assessment: Enrollment is a function of several factors, including basic demographic growth, migrant patterns, and economic conditions. Growth of 500 students each year on a base of 78,000 is less than one percent (0.64%). This is simply not a meaningful indicator of success in any way.

More importantly, as we have stressed in the paper, enrollment is an important metric, but it should not be a goal. Adding students to the district without strengthening the core educational program simply increases the number of children with insufficient academic preparation. If the district can increase the quality and equity of its school system, enrollment is likely to grow. If it cannot, families with better options than DPS schools would be well advised to take them. No one should support an enrollment decision that does not lead to the best possible outcome for kids.

Appendix A: Largest 35 Colorado Districts and Student Growth Scores, 2011

Elementary Schools

		Ave N	Math	Reading	Writing	Ave	
	District	Count	MGP	MGP	MGP	MGP	SD
1	Cherry Creek 5 - 0130	7191	58	56	57	57.0	1.6
2	Cheyenne Mountain 12 - 1020	1013	54	56	59	56.3	1.4
3	Eagle County Re 50 - 0910	898	57	57	54	56.0	1.4
4	Jefferson County R-1 - 1420	16286	55	57	55	55.7	1.3
5	Douglas County Re 1 - 0900	11681	55	55	56	55.3	1.2
6	Poudre R-1 - 1550	3635	55	54	57	55.3	1.2
7	Boulder Valley Re 2 - 0480	3935	54	53	58	55.0	1.1
8	Lewis-Palmer 38 - 1080	1101	50	58	57	55.0	1.1
9	Roaring Fork Re-1 - 1180	884	54	53	56	54.3	1.0
10	St Vrain Valley Re 1J - 0470	3683	49	55	56	53.3	0.7
11	Littleton 6 - 0140	1975	51	52	54	52.3	0.5
12	Fort Morgan Re-3 - 2405	663	50	52	54	52.0	0.4
13	Academy 20 - 1040	3152	51	50	53	51.3	0.3
14	Thompson R2-J - 1560	2101	49	54	51	51.3	0.3
15	Denver County 1 - 0880	10754	53	50	51	51.3	0.3
16	Delta County 50(J) - 0870	694	51	51	50	50.7	0.1
17	Adams 12 Five Star Schools - 0020	5673	52	49	50	50.3	0.1
18	Charter School Institute - 8001	947	48	52	51	50.3	0.1
19	Garfield Re-2 - 1195	1038	47	51	51	49.7	-0.1
20	Mesa County Valley 51 - 2000	2989	47	49	50	48.7	-0.3
21	Montrose County Re-1J - 2180	869	51	53	42	48.7	-0.3
22	Falcon 49 - 1110	2035	47	48	50	48.3	-0.4
23	Adams-Arapahoe 28J - 0180	5007	51	46	47	48.0	-0.5
24	Harrison 2 - 0980	1616	49	50	45	48.0	-0.5
25	Westminster 50 - 0070	1404	53	48	43	48.0	-0.5
26	Pueblo County 70 - 2700	1166	40	51	53	48.0	-0.5
27	Mapleton 1 - 0010	989	49	45	47	47.0	-0.7
28	Colorado Springs 11 - 1010	4861	46	49	45	46.7	-0.8
29	Greeley 6 - 3120	2710	51	42	45	46.0	-0.9
30	Fountain 8 - 1000	942	49	45	44	46.0	-0.9
31	Brighton 27J - 0040	2190	45	46	46	45.7	-1.0
32	Windsor Re-4 - 3100	637	43	48	44	45.0	-1.1
33	Adams County 14 - 0030	1031	42	47	43	44.0	-1.4
34	Widefield 3 - 0990	1160	44	41	42	42.3	-1.8
35	Pueblo City 60 - 2690	2554	35	40	40	38.3	-2.7

Appendix A: Largest 35 Colorado Districts and Student Growth Scores, 2011

Middle Schools

	District	Ave N Count	Math MGP	Reading MGP	Writing MGP	Ave MGP	SD
1	Roaring Fork Re-1 - 1180	805	64	63	67	64.7	2.6
2	Eagle County Re 50 - 0910	1151	62	61	58	60.3	1.8
3	St Vrain Valley Re 1J - 0470	5443	59	58	59	58.7	1.6
4	Johnstown-Milliken Re-5J - 3110	651	55	56	57	56.0	1.1
5	Montrose County Re-1J - 2180	1318	54	57	55	55.3	1.0
6	Durango 9-R - 1520	857	56	54	53	54.3	0.8
7	Denver County 1 - 0880	13890	55	53	54	54.0	0.8
8	Poudre R-1 - 1550	5292	57	52	52	53.7	0.7
9	Boulder Valley Re 2 - 0480	5988	52	54	53	53.0	0.6
10	Mesa County Valley 51 - 2000	4852	56	52	50	52.7	0.6
11	Cherry Creek 5 - 0130	10672	49	52	54	51.7	0.4
12	Adams County 14 - 0030	1408	52	51	52	51.7	0.4
13	Delta County 50(J) - 0870	981	47	52	52	50.3	0.2
14	Windsor Re-4 - 3100	983	51	49	50	50.0	0.1
15	Adams-Arapahoe 28J - 0180	6767	48	51	50	49.7	0.1
16	Jefferson County R-1 - 1420	12580	54	49	45	49.3	0.0
17	Adams 12 Five Star Schools - 0020	8195	51	49	48	49.3	0.0
18	Thompson R2-J - 1560	3001	48	53	47	49.3	0.0
19	Douglas County Re 1 - 0900	9905	50	46	51	49.0	-0.1
20	Littleton 6 - 0140	3140	51	49	47	49.0	-0.1
21	Widefield 3 - 0990	1674	57	45	45	49.0	-0.1
22	Academy 20 - 1040	4395	45	49	52	48.7	-0.1
23	Falcon 49 - 1110	2953	51	47	48	48.7	-0.1
24	Lewis-Palmer 38 - 1080	943	45	51	47	47.7	-0.3
25	Charter School Institute - 8001	1288	42	48	49	46.3	-0.5
26	Mapleton 1 - 0010	1277	43	45	49	45.7	-0.6
27	Fountain 8 - 1000	1248	42	43	50	45.0	-0.7
28	Brighton 27J - 0040	2923	43	47	44	44.7	-0.8
29	Colorado Springs 11 - 1010	5368	45	44	44	44.3	-0.8
30	Harrison 2 - 0980	1794	45	42	45	44.0	-0.9
31	Pueblo County 70 - 2700	2055	39	44	43	42.0	-1.2
32	Canon City Re-1 - 1140	741	40	42	44	42.0	-1.2
33	Westminster 50 - 0070	1814	35	46	42	41.0	-1.4
34	Greeley 6 - 3120	3747	38	39	42	39.7	-1.6
35	Pueblo City 60 - 2690	3263	31	37	38	35.3	-2.3

Appendix A: Largest 35 Colorado Districts and Student Growth Scores, 2011

High Schools

	District	Ave N Count	Math MGP	Reading MGP	Writing MGP	Ave MGP	SD
1	Roaring Fork Re-1 - 1180	694	68	64	62	64.7	2.6
2	Mapleton 1 - 0010	715	58	58	55	57.0	1.3
3	Littleton 6 - 0140	2358	63	53	51	55.7	1.1
4	Delta County 50(J) - 0870	696	47	56	62	55.0	1.0
5	Cheyenne Mountain 12 - 1020	586	63	51	51	55.0	1.0
6	Mesa County Valley 51 - 2000	2427	56	53	55	54.7	0.9
7	Denver County 1 - 0880	7483	53	55	54	54.0	0.8
8	Jefferson County R-1 - 1420	11605	57	53	49	53.0	0.6
9	Cherry Creek 5 - 0130	6778	53	54	52	53.0	0.6
10	Harrison 2 - 0980	996	52	52	54	52.7	0.6
11	Adams-Arapahoe 28J - 0180	3571	51	54	52	52.3	0.5
12	Adams 12 Five Star Schools - 0020	4915	52	52	52	52.0	0.5
13	Thompson R2-J - 1560	2043	54	53	49	52.0	0.5
14	Charter School Institute - 8001	834	45	53	57	51.7	0.4
15	Boulder Valley Re 2 - 0480	4062	58	45	51	51.3	0.4
16	Falcon 49 - 1110	1758	49	51	54	51.3	0.4
17	Douglas County Re 1 - 0900	7639	46	50	55	50.3	0.2
18	Poudre R-1 - 1550	3580	49	50	52	50.3	0.2
19	Academy 20 - 1040	3291	49	48	52	49.7	0.1
20	Montrose County RE-1J - 2180	831	52	49	48	49.7	0.1
21	Garfield RE-2 - 1195	574	50	52	47	49.7	0.1
22	Durango 9-R - 1520	532	53	44	51	49.3	0.0
23	Pueblo County 70 - 2700	1217	43	50	50	47.7	-0.3
24	Brighton 27J - 0040	1634	47	48	47	47.3	-0.3
25	Eagle County RE 50 - 0910	715	48	44	49	47.0	-0.4
26	Greeley 6 - 3120	2216	54	44	42	46.7	-0.4
27	Lewis-Palmer 38 - 1080	925	42	43	51	45.3	-0.6
28	St Vrain Valley RE 1J - 0470	3332	44	43	47	44.7	-0.8
29	Colorado Springs 11 - 1010	3336	43	41	46	43.3	-1.0
30	Windsor RE-4 - 3100	1136	38	41	47	42.0	-1.2
31	Fountain 8 - 1000	729	38	41	45	41.3	-1.3
32	Windsor RE-4 - 3100	509	43	37	39	39.7	-1.6
33	Westminster 50 - 0070	1157	36	42	40	39.3	-1.6
34	Adams County 14 - 0030	850	36	43	35	38.0	-1.9
35	Pueblo City 60 - 2690	2239	33	38	37	36.0	-2.2